
GRADUATE ASSISTANT GUIDE

2017 – 2018

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Overview

Graduate Assistants at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) function both as students and as professionals, enhancing their education by playing this important dual role. While studying to meet academic requirements for advanced degrees, Graduate Assistants also complement their formal studies through research and/or teaching under the supervision or tutelage of UMB faculty and staff.

As a graduate student, you will be concerned mainly with your individual teaching or research assignment and with activities within your program. You will also be a professional, albeit of an apprentice nature, in a large, complex university. Thus, you will need a clear understanding of your dual status, being aware especially of the requirements, responsibilities, and privileges of your position as both student and professional.

This booklet is a compilation of campus policies and practices that relate specifically to recipients of graduate assistantships and PLUS awards. You should also become thoroughly familiar with the academic

regulations of the Graduate School and the special requirements of your program.

Other university policies and procedures can be found on the Graduate School's Web site at www.graduate.umaryland.edu.

Assistantship Status and Duties

A Graduate Assistantship is a study grant of financial assistance to a graduate student that is offered in return for certain services at UMB. According to the United States Department of Labor, students receiving a salary as graduate teaching assistants or research assistants will not be affected by the Final Rule, even if they work more than 40 hours per week. Services to UMB are further described below. A graduate assistant at UMB receives a tuition waiver for up to 10 credits of coursework per semester (not summer), a stipend, and student health insurance for the Fall and Spring semesters.

Graduate assistants are graduate students with academic endeavors and research as their top priorities; they are not university employees. Graduate assistants work under the supervision of the program offering the appointment. The program determines the

assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for reappointment and promotion to the respective stipend level(s). The graduate program is the primary source of information for assistantship details. Graduate assistant duties may be determined by the program director, any duly-appointed executive committees or assistants to the director, or the faculty member assigned to supervise the course, laboratory session, or research project in which the assistant is involved.

The assigned duties of a graduate assistant shall be consistent with the teaching and research missions of the university. The assignment depends on the graduate program's needs and the experience and qualifications of the assistant.

There are two main categories of employment for graduate students: graduate research assistantships (GRA) and graduate teaching assistantships (GTA). If duties include both research and teaching, the greater percentage of duties will dictate the assistantship title. At the University of Maryland, Baltimore, assistantships are academic appointments without tenure.

Graduate Research Assistants

A GRA is a graduate student whose primary focus is research related. Most graduate students who are supported by assistantships on this campus fall into this category.

Generally, a Graduate Research Assistantship provides support to students while they are completing coursework or research directly related to degree progression. However, in some programs the work the GRA is assigned is not necessarily related to his or her progression toward a degree. This full-time GRA is expected to work 20 hours a week.

GRA duties vary according to the nature of the research project in which the student participates and the source of funding. GRA's may be assigned to work on research that is directly applicable to their thesis or dissertation to be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's or doctoral degree. GRA duties are performed under the direction and supervision of a University or Graduate Faculty member, principle investigator or other authorized university representative.

All GRA appointees, whether funded by the Graduate School, one of the professional schools, or a research grant, are expected to devote 100 percent effort to his/her studies or research project.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

A GTA is a graduate student whose main focus is assisting in a teaching program. Typically, a full-time GTA works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with university guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and student health insurance. A GTA is expected to devote 100 percent effort, after completion of the 20 hour work commitment, to his or her studies or research project.

The specific duties of a GTA vary from one program to another, but for the majority of GTAs, assignments and responsibilities fall into the following categories:

- Administration of community programs, workshops, and so on;
- Assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative duties associated with a course or courses;
- Teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion session of a course; or

- Teaching responsibility for a classroom section if a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the course director.

GTAs serving in any capacity are under the direction and close supervision of a University or Graduate Faculty member. Graduate students functioning as teaching assistants will not be allowed to be solely in charge of a course, but will be given an appropriate degree of responsibility in a classroom or laboratory so that they may be introduced to teaching activities gradually and effectively. The final responsibility for material covered, grades, and other formal course duties remain with the supervising faculty member. Distribution of duties among teaching assistants is in the hands of the graduate program and should reflect both the interests and skills of the graduate assistants and the desire of the program to further their professional development.

Qualification and Selection

A graduate assistant must be a registered graduate student, enrolled full-time in a degree program, who is making satisfactory progress toward a degree. All graduate students are expected to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or

better. The appointee should hold an appropriate baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution. Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who appear likely to render a high quality of service to the university by their teaching and research activities.

The program director selects graduate assistants upon the recommendation of a graduate student recruitment committee or the student's mentor.

The Graduate School is an equal opportunity institution with respect to both education and employment. Its policies are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on affirmative action and equal opportunity employment. Graduate research and teaching assistants are selected according to these policies.

Appointment and Duration of Employment

An assistantship appointment may be either full time (20 hours per week) or half time (10 hours per week). (See "Benefits Available to Graduate Assistants" for benefits associated with these two appointment categories.) Appointments

may not be for less than half time; $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{2}{3}$, or $\frac{3}{4}$ appointments are not permitted.

Graduate assistants may be appointed for a regular academic year (10 months) or a 12-month period. Ten-month appointments begin with the fall semester and end June 30. Twelve-month appointments generally begin either July 1 or Sept. 1.

Each graduate program is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with university policy, and for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships. Reappointment is generally dependent upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree, and the needs of the program. Appointment and reappointment are contingent upon the availability of funds. Every effort will be made to continue funding PhD candidates in good standing who lose mentor funding.

Letter of Appointment

The official letter of appointment for a graduate assistantship comes from the program director or faculty member whose research project funds the assistantship. See the back of this booklet for a sample letter of

appointment. Students must receive a letter of appointment or reappointment annually.

This letter provides pertinent information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

1. Stipend level and amount
2. Remission of tuition and student health insurance
3. Permissible level of course registration per semester
4. Specific beginning and ending dates of the appointment and date on which the graduate assistant is expected to report to the program
5. Expected type of duties and the person to whom the student will report
6. Estimated time commitment in terms of responsibilities to the program
7. Acceptance deadline date and program director/PI and student signature

Note that the Graduate School and the Student Financial Aid office must be copied on all letters of appointment.

Registration Requirements

Graduate assistants must register as full-time students whether they are appointed to a full- or half-time assistantship. To be considered full-time, a student must register

for a minimum of 9 credits per semester (not summer).

Graduate assistants must register for ABGA 900 or 901 depending upon her/his designation (see graduate assistant categories below). ABGA 900, 901 courses officially establishes the student as a graduate assistant. If graduate assistants do not register for one of these courses, the Internal Revenue Service may not recognize them as working students and may tax them for Social Security (FICA).

ABGA 900 and 901 registrations are entered as 'Pass' (P/F) courses but do not count toward the tuition remission awarded as part of graduate assistant benefits and students do not pay for the course. Students may not use these credits to fulfill graduation requirements.

Also, courses taken for Audit (AU) do not count toward the minimum credit requirement for degree completion. Courses that are graded AU are counted as attempted, not passed or earned hours. No quality points are awarded for courses taken for Audit. Thus, courses taken/graded AU are not included in grade point average (GPA) calculations. Graduate School

funded assistantships will not pay for courses taken for Audit.

Graduate Research Assistant (GRA)

A GRA is a graduate student whose primary focus is research related. GRA duties vary according to the nature of the research project in which the student participates and the source of funding. GRAs may work under a faculty member or mentor/PI in her/his research, or may be assigned to work on research that is applicable to the student's thesis or dissertation. *GRA's must enroll in ABGA 900*

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)

A GTA is a graduate student whose main focus is assisting in a teaching program. The specific duties of a GTA vary from one program to another, but for the majority of GTAs, assignments and responsibilities fall into the following categories:

1. Administration of community programs, workshops, and so on
2. Assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative duties associated with a course or courses
3. Teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion session of a course, or

4. Teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the course director.
GTA's must enroll in ABGA 901

Registration Information – Below are the Course Registration Numbers (CRN's) for each assistantship category:

ABGA 900 (7 cr.) Graduate Research Assistant

Fall Term – Section 01: CRN=90001

Spring Term – Section 01: CRN=20001

Summer Term – Section 01: CRN=60001

ABGA 901 (7 cr.) Graduate Teaching Assistant

Fall Term – Section 01: CRN=90003

Spring Term – Section 01: CRN=20003

Summer Term – Section 01: CRN=60003

ABGA credits are counted toward the nine credits required for full time registration.

Stipends

Assistantships are funded from several sources. Assistantships are generally paid from state funds. GRAs may be provided by the campus, the student's program, a research grant to the student's mentor, a

training grant, or a student may receive his/her own training grant.

All assistantships, whatever the source, must meet the minimum criteria for stipend and benefits outlined in this document.

The stipends of students holding individual awards from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation or any other government or private foundation, will also be supplemented to the level set by the Graduate School. The student's program must notify the Graduate School of the award.

Students that received stipends directly from external sources must contact the Graduate School to verify if they are eligible for Graduate Assistant benefits.

Students should be aware that graduate assistantships are considered a financial resource in determining one's eligibility for need-based financial aid.

Minimum Stipends

The university sets minimum stipends for graduate assistantships. Stipend levels are established annually.

There are two levels (also known as "steps") for the classification of graduate assistants. These levels, which are based on experience and progress toward the degree, determine the minimum stipend that may be awarded. A level I stipend is awarded to first and second year graduate assistants. Upon successful admission to candidacy for the Ph.D., the student may be eligible to receive a level II stipend. Departmental budget constraints may affect promotions.

When a change to a level II stipend is initiated, approval from the Graduate School (that is, a copy of the admission to candidacy letter) must be forwarded to the payroll office along with the revised payroll action form by the program/departmental payroll representative.

Any stipend that exceeds the minimum must be approved by the Graduate School. A written request specifying the reasons for exceeding standard stipend levels should be forwarded to the Graduate School by the program director or coordinator.

Stipend Limits

Stipend limits are based on the NIH principle that stipends may not be "unreasonably high." This means that the

total benefits (stipend, tuition, and health insurance) provided to a graduate assistant may not exceed the NIH standard compensation level for a first year postdoctoral fellow (NIH year '0'). See www.grants.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm for more information on NIH's standard compensation levels.

Payroll and Payroll Titles

Graduate assistantship stipends are paid through the university payroll system. Graduate students must submit all documentation required by the university to their program/departmental administrator or payroll representative. Questions regarding payroll should be addressed to the program administrator and then to Human Resource Services (Administration Building, 620 West Lexington Street, 3rd Floor, 6-7600).

Payroll titles are listed as the following:

- 936606 Graduate Teaching Assistant I
- 936607 Graduate Teaching Assistant II
- 936601 Graduate Research Assistant I
- 936603 Graduate Research Assistant II

Benefits Available to Graduate Assistants

Tuition Remission

Graduate assistantship appointment status determines tuition remission benefits. Full-

time graduate assistants (20 hours per week) receive 10 credit hours tuition remission in the fall and spring semesters. Half-time graduate assistants (10 hours per week) receive 5 credit hours tuition remission and one-half student health in the fall and spring semesters, or 10 credits of tuition remission in the Fall or Spring only. The Graduate School does not offer tuition remission for winter or summer sessions.

For each semester that graduate assistants are eligible for remission, they must complete a tuition remission form by the first day of classes. Remission is not automatically applied to a student's account. Note that the tuition remission form for graduate assistants signals the Student Information Management System to bill the student at the in-state rate. It should be filed at the earliest opportunity.

The following procedures should be followed each semester to ensure tuition remission:

- The graduate assistant obtains a tuition remission form from her/his department/program coordinator or payroll representative, or from Human Resource Services (Administration Building 620 West Lexington Street, 3rd

Floor, 6-7600) by presenting her/his letter of appointment.

- The student prepares and signs the tuition remission form. If a student is taking courses on more than one campus within the University of Maryland System, a form must be completed for each campus.
- The funding source and the appropriate institutional chartstring information are added and signed to show approval. Depending on the funding source, the signer will be the program director, the dean, the department administrator or coordinator, the student's mentor or Celeste Gerhart in the Graduate School.
- The form is approved by Human Resource Services.
- The form is submitted to Student Accounting, HS/HSL, 601 West Lombard Street, 2nd Floor, 6-2930) for processing.

Student Health Insurance

It is the University's policy that all UMB students have health insurance. Graduate assistants who do not have other equivalent coverage must be enrolled in the university student health insurance plan. The premiums for graduate assistants (both part-time and full-time) are covered by their

assistantships, depending on the funding source. A booklet, "Health Care for Students at the University of Maryland," describing this plan is available from Student Accounting (HS/HSL, second floor, 6-2930). Graduate students who already have equivalent coverage may waive the campus insurance by following the directions in the booklet. Note that prescription medications are covered under this plan, but vision and dental claims are not. Optional dental and vision plans are available at the students' own expense. And students may purchase family coverage since it is not normally covered by the university.

The university automatically enrolls and bills full-time students for the student health insurance plan. Enrollment occurs at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters (effective Aug. 1 and Feb. 1, respectively.) Students who arrive on campus before the beginning of a semester or who register for fewer than 9 credits their first semester at the university must enroll themselves in the insurance plan. They should do this when they arrive on campus. Students need only enroll for student health insurance one time using www.umaryland.benelogic.com. Charges for student health insurance will

then appear on the student's bill. If those charges are to be paid by a graduate assistantship administered by the Graduate School, the student should obtain a signed health insurance charge-back form from Celeste Gerhart in the Graduate School (620 West Lexington Street, 5th Floor, 6-6794) or the payer of the award. These forms can then be returned to Student Accounting HS/HSL, 601 West Lombard Street 2nd Floor) to cover the premium.

In-State Billing

Graduate assistants are eligible for in-state billing during the performance of the assistantship. In order to receive this benefit, the student must submit a Tuition Remission form to the Human Resources office at least six (6) weeks prior to the start of the term for which they are registered. Tuition remission is available to students who are on payroll and who are registered for the term. For summer and winter terms, remission is not available. Completion of the "Tuition/Fees/Insurance Payment by Grant Funds" form (see <http://www.fincsvc.umaryland.edu/images/tuition-payment-PS.pdf>) is required for in-state billing status. Upon termination of the assistantship, students are billed according to their original billing status, unless they

have filed a formal petition for a permanent change of residency. Copies of the in-state status petition are available at the Office of the Registrar, 601 West Lombard Street (HS/HSL, Suite 240, 607481). Information is also online at www.umaryland.edu/orr/.

Student Fees

Students are responsible for paying fees associated with registration. Information is available online at <http://www.fincsvc.umaryland.edu/sa/tuition.cfm>

Retirement and Social Security

Retirement and Social Security (FICA) taxes are not withheld from the stipends of graduate assistants, and students are not entitled to the benefits that accrue from such withholding.

Vacation and Sick Leave

Graduate assistants are not covered by the University of Maryland's vacation or leave policies applicable to faculty or staff. However, the University of Maryland recommends that the mentor or supervisor of a graduate assistant provide the graduate assistant with two weeks of leave each calendar year and a limited amount of time for absence due to unexpected sickness, family or any other emergency. Leave time for graduate assistants should be granted on

an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis. Any graduate assistant leave approved by the mentor or supervisor must be used by the graduate assistant during the calendar year for which it was approved. Leave does not carry-over from one year to the next.

Credit Union

Graduate assistants are eligible to join the State Employees Credit Union of Maryland. For details, call 410-487-7328, visit www.secu.org, or stop by the local branch at 11 S. Paca Street.

University-based Benefits

Graduate assistants may enroll in the following at their own expense: tax-deferred investment plans, long-term insurance, automobile and home insurance, vision and dental insurance. For details, visit or call Human Resource Services (Administration Building 620 West Lexington Street, 3rd Floor, 6-7600).

Conduct and Discipline

In their research and teaching activities, all graduate assistants are subject to the ethical precepts and code of the academic profession, to the laws of the state of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the university policies that govern their institutional obligations. Violation of any of

these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action.

Performance Reviews

Each program is responsible for determining and implementing procedures for review and evaluation of graduate assistants. Therefore, the process of evaluation will vary. It may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluation. The results of reviews and evaluation should be discussed with the graduate assistant concerned.

Termination

A graduate assistant appointment may be terminated before expiration of the specified time under unusual and compelling conditions, such as:

1. Incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty
2. Misconduct that is job-related
3. Delinquency in academic work
4. Moral turpitude
5. Discontinuance of the work in which the appointment is made
6. Chronic physical or mental ailment or defect that interferes with the graduate

assistant's performance of required duties

7. Academic misconduct
8. Violation of the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities for Academic Integrity
9. Voluntary mutual agreement, and
10. Change in budgetary appropriations.

Except in the most egregious instance, the graduate assistant will receive written notice of termination at least two weeks before the effective date.

Additional Employment

Graduate assistantships are awarded with the intent of both providing financial support and contributing to the recipient's professional development. In all instances, it is understood that the graduate student's priority should be his or her studies and research and that 100 percent of his or her effort will be devoted to this endeavor.

Graduate assistants whose terms of appointment include a work component are not, therefore, expected to work more than 20 hours per week on any project or set of projects not directly related to their dissertation research. Other graduate assistants are not permitted to take on any work beyond their studies or research within or outside the university. Therefore,

graduate assistants are ineligible for additional awards that include a work component. With prior approval from the Graduate School Dean, graduate assistants participate in an approved fellowship program. A graduate assistant who receives external support for his or her research will be expected to end his or her graduate assistantship. During the summer session, Graduate Assistants who have completed at least their second year may receive supplemental compensation for working increased hours on related projects beyond their appointment. Payment requests will be processed only for increased hours worked during the summer session; see Graduate School academic calendar. Before work begins, approval must be obtained from the student's adviser, graduate program director, the Office of International studies (international students only), and the Office of the Graduate School Dean.

The request form can be found at:

http://www.hr.umaryland.edu/main/GRA_su_pp_pay_form.pdf

Tax Status

Stipends received through graduate assistantships are generally considered taxable income and thus may be subject to federal, state and local taxes. Graduate

assistants are encouraged to consult with their own tax counsel, the Internal Revenue Service and/or their own state and local tax codes to determine specific obligations regarding stipends, scholarships, fellowships or other forms of tuition reduction. *Note: Special rules may apply to non-US citizens or non-resident aliens.*

Visiting GRAs

Sometimes a graduate student pursues dissertation research on this campus while registered as a student at another university. This situation can arise when a student's adviser has recently come from another university to join our faculty or when a student registered elsewhere comes to UMB to pursue a project with one of our faculty members. Such students should be considered Visiting GRAs and the following steps should be taken:

- The program should ensure that the student is covered by health insurance from his or home institution.
- The student should sign the "Visiting Scientist Agreement" form, which protects the intellectual property rights of our campus. Copies of this agreement and of the Visiting

Scientist Policy can be obtained from Research and Development (620 West Lexington Street 4th Floor, 6-1874).

- The program director should make certain that the student has completed all of the safety training required or appropriate for the student's laboratory placement (such as radio-isotope handling or procedures to minimize exposure to blood-borne pathogens). If not, such training should be arranged with the Environmental Health and Safety Office
- If the student is to be paid with grant funds administered by this campus, he or she should be assigned the payroll title of GRA. A letter stating that the student is enrolled as a full-time student at his or her home institution and providing the name of that institution should be submitted along with the payroll action form. A second copy of this letter should be sent to Celeste Gerhart in the Graduate School (620 West Lexington Street 5th Floor, 6-6794). The student will then be FICA-exempt. The student should *not* register for ABGA 900/901 and

should not be given the GRA since he or she is *not* a full-time student enrolled on this campus.

- If the student is being paid by his or her home institution, s/he will not be on the UMB payroll. The Graduate School should be notified in writing, however, as in 4 above.

Note: International students are not considered for “Visiting GRA status”

Graduate Assistants from Other USM Campuses

Upon occasion, a faculty member will wish to support a graduate student from another University System of Maryland (USM) campus to work on a project. The Process for doing this is as follows:

- The faculty member, through consultation with the student and his or her graduate program identifies a suitable student. It is important at this point to obtain the agreement of the graduate program director as to the details of the appointment. These details should be clearly stated

in the graduate assistant’s letter of approval.

- The student is put on the university payroll as a graduate assistant on our campus.
- The student completes a tuition remission form showing that registration will be on the student’s home campus and files the form with our Human Resource Services office just as other graduate assistants do.
- The student completes and files an inter-institutional registration form for ABGA 900 or 901 on this campus.
- The faculty member arranges to cover the costs of the student’s health insurance at his or her home campus.
- International students on F-1 or J-1 visas must have written work authorization from the international office on their home campus prior to engaging in their graduate assistant duties.

Appendices

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Sample Graduate Assistant Appointment Letter

Dear (Name)

Congratulations! Upon recommendation of the (Name) program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, I am pleased to offer you a Graduate (Research or Teaching) Assistantship for the period of (Date) to (Date). This assistantship consists of a stipend of (\$), tuition remission for up to 10 credits for the fall and spring semesters, and health insurance benefits. Please be aware that graduate assistantships are considered a financial resource in determining one's eligibility for need-based financial aid.

As a graduate assistant, you will perform duties as assigned by your faculty mentor, Dr. (Name), for a total 20 hours per week. You will be expected to devote 100 percent of your effort, after completion of your work assignments, to your studies and research. You may not be employed in any other capacity. In addition, you must be registered as a full-time student each semester and session that you hold an assistantship.

- Or -

As a graduate assistant, you will be expected to devote 100 percent of your effort to the successful completion of your studies and research and to perform duties as assigned by your faculty mentor, Dr. (Name). You may not be employed in any other capacity. In addition you must be registered as a full-time student each semester and session that you hold an assistantship. Acceptance of this offer is an agreement that both the student and program are expected to honor. In those instances in which a student accepts the offer before (Date), and subsequently desires to withdraw, the student must resign the appointment in writing before (Date). An acceptance given or left in force after (Date) commits the student to not accepting another offer

without first obtaining a written release from the program making the original offer. Similarly, an offer by the program is conditional on presentation by the student of a written release from any previously-accepted offer. The *Graduate Assistant Guide* booklet, available at www.graduate.umaryland.edu, has more details concerning this appointment. Please notify my office whether you will accept this offer by signing and returning this agreement by (Date). We are looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely

(Name)

I accept the graduate assistantship offer for the period of (Date) and agree to the conditions of the award

Signature

Date:

Cc: Graduate School
Student Financial Aid

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Graduate Assistant Checklist

- Appointment Letter (Submit Each Year of Appointment)

- ABGA 900/901 Registration (Enroll Each Fall and Spring Semester)

- Tuition Remission Form (Submit Each Semester of Appointment)

- Student Health Insurance Enrollment (Needed Each Semester of Appointment)

- Student Health Insurance Charge-back Authorization (Submit Each Semester of Appointment)

- Payroll Hire/Action Form (and all necessary forms) (Submit Each Semester of Appointment)

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Contact Information

Financial Aid

Student Financial Aid: 410-706-7347

www.umaryland.edu/fin

Graduate School: 410-706-6794

www.graduate.umaryland.edu

Health Insurance

Student Accounting: 410-706-2930

www.fincsvc.umaryland.edu/sa

Student Health: 410-328-6645

www.umaryland.edu/health

www.umaryland.benelogic.com

Human Resources

Human Resource Services: 410-706-7600

www.hr.umaryland.edu

NIH

www.grants.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm

Payroll

Financial Services: 410-706-8581

www.fincsvc.umaryland.edu/payroll

Registration

Office of the Registrar: 410-706-7480

www.umaryland.edu/orr/

International Services

International Services: 410-706-7488

www.umaryland.edu/ois